

The AECC Presents

THE 2ND ANNUAL AUSTIN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYMPOSIUM

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

2014 IMPACT REPORT

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FINAL REPORT

on the

2nd Annual Austin Early Childhood Symposium

Executive Summary

The 2nd Annual Austin Early Childhood Symposium: Building a Strong Foundation for Success was held Saturday, October 11, 2014 from 9am – 4pm at By the Hand Club for Kids, 415 N. Laramie, Chicago. The event served 181 participants, including 63 home-based childcare providers, 49 center-based childcare providers, 12 others who work in childcare settings, 7 school teachers, 7 parents, 6 social workers, 3 unemployed childcare workers, and 1 home visitor. Due to two oversights in the registration process, data regarding role were not obtained from 33 participants.

Activities

The Symposium's program commenced with the screening of an 11-minute segment of *The Raising of America*, a new documentary examining the status of early childhood care and education in the United States; the screening was followed by a panel discussion featuring a community organizer, a policy expert, a parent-leader, and a childcare provider. Following the panel discussion, participants engaged in two 90-minute workshop sessions, selecting from a menu of eighteen workshops on topics such as social-emotional development, early literacy, screening for developmental delays, engaging parents of young children, starting a childcare business, quality improvement in childcare businesses, and trauma-informed childcare. Sixteen workshops were offered in English; two were offered in Spanish. The afternoon workshop session was followed by the keynote address delivered by a representative of the American Academy of Pediatrics and an awards ceremony honoring eight champions of early childhood care and education in Austin.

The Symposium also featured a Resource Fair that included twenty-two vendors, including universities, healthcare professionals, legislators, Austin businesses, community organizations, and early childhood advocacy organizations.

Evaluations

Participants filled out evaluations at the end of each workshop and an overall Symposium evaluation at the end of the day. Of the eighteen workshops, sixteen sets of evaluations were returned; in two workshops, the evaluation forms were

inadvertently not distributed. Average workshop evaluation scores ranged from 4.1 to 5.0 on a 5-point scale.

Scores on four of the five measures on the overall Symposium evaluation were 4.83 or higher; the fifth score (for food/beverages) was 3.99; and participants rated their overall experience at 4.67 (all on a 5-point Likert scale).

Budget

Total expenses for the Symposium were \$7,381.89; total revenues were \$7,646.00. Thus, the Symposium garnered a surplus of \$264.11.

Review

Following the Symposium, the planning team engaged in a review of the planning and implementation process, with the objective of identifying and articulating best practices, challenges/barriers, and lessons learned. In the first phase of the review, the four key planners (Darnell Shields, Andrew Born, Amy Voegel, and Ruth Kimble) met to debrief. In the second phase, Amy Voegel held conversations via phone and e-mail with a purposive sample of participants, vendors, presenters, panelists, and volunteers to solicit additional input regarding these individuals' experiences and their suggestions for improving future Symposia. Findings and conclusions are included in the "Lessons Learned" and "Next Steps" sections of the full report, below.

Final Report

The 2nd Annual Austin Early Childhood Symposium: Building a Strong Foundation for Success was held Saturday, October 11, 2014 from 9am – 4pm at By the Hand Club for Kids, 415 N. Laramie, Chicago.

Participants

A total of 306 potential attendees registered for the Symposium. Of this group, 181 actually attended: 158 pre-registrants and 23 walk-ins.

Attendees

The 181 Symposium attendees included the following:

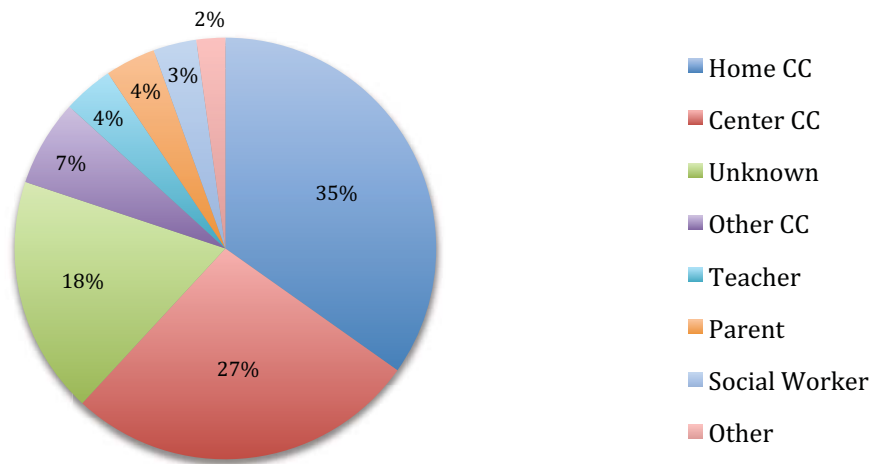
- 63 Home-based childcare providers
- 49 Center-based childcare providers
- 7 School teachers
- 7 Parents
- 55 Others

Among those who identified their role as “Other,” 22 identified themselves in the following ways:

- 9 Childcare assistants
- 6 Social workers
- 1 Substitute childcare worker
- 1 Support staff at a center
- 1 Center administrator
- 1 planning to open a center
- 1 planning to open a home-based CC
- 1 looking for work
- 1 Home visitor

Also included in the “Others” category are 33 attendees who were not asked to identify their roles. 23 of these were walk-in registrants who were asked only for their names and phone numbers. The other 10 attendees whose roles were unidentified had registered online for Track Nine; this track was added to the online registration form later than Tracks One through Eight, and the question about role was inadvertently omitted from the sign-up page.

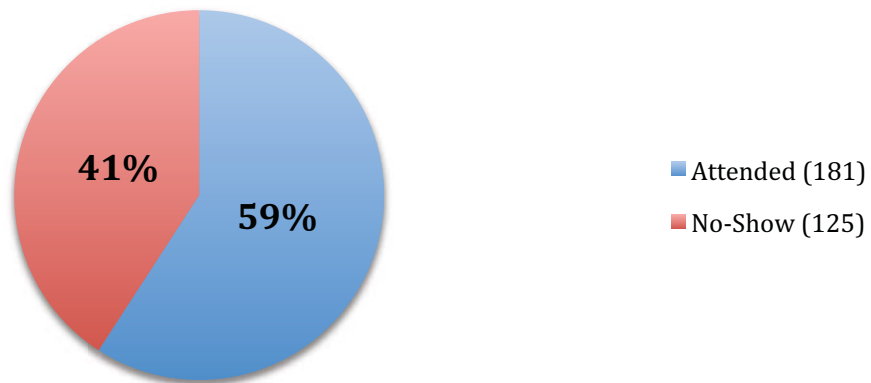
Attendees by Role



No-Shows

Several individuals pre-registered for more than one workshop Track; each of them was asked to attend her/his first choice and was considered a “no-show” for any additional workshops for which s/he had pre-registered. This accounted for 15 of the “no-shows.” The other 110 “no-shows” included 36 home childcare providers; 21 center-based providers; 16 parents; 18 teachers; 1 grandparent; 1 home visitor; 10 whose role was not asked; and 7 “others.”

Pre-registration: Attendees vs No-shows (Total of 306 Registrants)



Activities

The day's formal activities included a panel discussion, morning and afternoon workshops, keynote address, and awards ceremony. A copy of the Symposium Itinerary is included in the Appendix to this report.

Video and Panel Discussion

The screening of an 11-minute clip from the documentary "The Raising of America", an examination of the state of early childhood care and education in the United States followed a brief Welcome at 9:00 am. The video served as a springboard to a 60-minute panel discussion moderated by Choua Vue of Illinois Action for Children. The panel consisted of Gail Nourse (Ounce of Prevention Fund), Maralda Davis (COFI – Community Organizing and Family Issues), and Margaret Johnson (Austin Childcare Providers' Network). Input and questions from the audience were encouraged, and a robust discussion ensued, centered on the barriers faced by families of young children in low-income communities such as Austin, and on the powerful impact that collective action can have on overcoming those obstacles.

Workshops

Each attendee registered for one of nine available workshop "Tracks." Each Track consisted of two workshops – one in the morning and one in the afternoon – on closely related topics. In several cases, the afternoon workshop was a continuation of the morning workshop, with the same facilitator(s), allowing for a deeper exploration of a particular topic; in other Tracks, the morning and afternoon sessions consisted of separate workshops on related topics, delivered by different facilitators.

The nine workshop Tracks and the titles and presenters of each workshop are listed below. A description of each workshop is included in the Appendix to this report.

- **Track 1: Starting a Childcare Center**
 - *Living Your Passion in Early Childhood Education:* Mark Obuchowski, INCCRRA/Gateways
 - *Opening a Quality Childcare Center in Illinois:* Ruth Kimble & Jacqueline Hester, Austin Childcare Providers' Network
- **Track 2: Starting a Home-based Childcare Business**
 - *Is a Home-based Daycare Right for You?* Kim Pickens & Dollie Sherman, Austin Childcare Providers' Network
 - *Are You Lost in the Missing Zone?* Mark Obuchowski, INCCRRA/Gateways
- **Track 3: Quality Improvement in Your Childcare Business**

- *Embracing Continuous Quality Improvement*: Safiyah Jackson, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership
- *Using the Program Administration Scale and the Business Administration Scale to Enhance Family Engagement*: Linda Butkovich, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership
- **Track 4: Early Language and Literacy Development**
 - *TALK: Thinking about Language and Kids, Part 1*: Emily Hoffman, University of Illinois at Chicago
 - *TALK: Thinking about Language and Kids, Part 2*: Colleen Whittingham, University of Illinois at Chicago
- **Track 5: Desarrollo del lenguaje y alfabetización temprano**
 - *Desarrollo del lenguaje y alfabetización temprano, parte 1: ¡Dílo en español!*: Samina Hadi-Tabassum, Dominican University
 - *Desarrollo del lenguaje y alfabetización temprano, parte 2: Buenos hábitos del lectura en el hogar*: Samina Hadi-Tabassum, Dominican University
- **Track 6: Meeting the Needs of All Children**
 - *Developmental Screening: The First Line of Defense in Supporting Children's Development (Screening Young Children for Developmental Delays)*: Pamela Epley, Erikson Institute
 - *Supporting All Children's Growth Toward School Success*: Safiyah Jackson, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership
- **Track 7: Working with Families of Young Children**
 - *Tapping the Leadership Potential of Parents*: Tracy Occomy Crowder, COFI
 - *Building Parental Capacity through Home Visiting*: Michelle Lee, Fussy Baby Network, Erikson Institute
- **Track 8: Trauma-Informed Childcare**
 - *Adverse Childhood Experiences and Resilience*: Marlita White, Chicago Safe Start
 - *The Sanctuary Model for Building a Culture of Safety, Peace, and Well-Being (Sanctuary Café)*: Lina Cramer, Wisdom Exchange & Renee Jackson, The Next Generation of Leaders
- **Track 9: Social-Emotional Learning**
 - *Foundations that Promote Engagement and Prevent Challenging Behavior*: Katie Haffner, Teach for America
 - *Teaching Social and Emotional Skills*: Katie Haffner, Teach for America

Keynote Address and Awards Ceremony

The Symposium's closing session included the keynote address, delivered by Elise Groenewegen, Coordinator of Early Childhood Development for the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and Coalition Leader of Reach Out and Read Illinois. The keynote reflected on the day's activities and conversations, focusing on the importance of engaging the entire Austin community in ensuring the healthy development of Austin's infants, toddlers, and young children.

The second annual Awards Ceremony followed the keynote; this year, the AECC honored eight champions of Austin's young children.

Three Awardees for Excellence in Community Engagement were honored:

- State Representative La Shawn Ford, whose legislative work over the past seven years has strengthened education, employment opportunities, and supports for Austin families;
- By the Hand Club for Kids, an after-school program that supports those of Austin's youth who are most at-risk for dropping out of school and that has made its state-of-the-art facility available to the AECC for professional development workshops, the Symposium, and related events; and
- Ms. Lisa Smith, Head Start teacher at DePriest Elementary School for the past 19 years, who has been instrumental in DePriest's Keep Kids Learning Summer Camp, which provides academic enrichment and social skill development for elementary school children.

Awards for Excellence in Family Engagement were given to two individuals:

- Ms. Lenita Edgeworth, parent of a young child and a home visitor with Bethel New Life's Right Start for Families program, who has been instrumental in teaching and engaging parents throughout Austin and who is the first parent-leader to join the AECC; and
- Mrs. Cynthia Peterson, Family/Community Resource Coordinator at Spencer Technology Academy, whose 30+ years of service at the school have included a number of roles, most recently as coordinator of Spencer Tech's Parent Scholars and Parent University programs.

In addition, two individuals and one organization received Awards for Excellence in Professional Development:

- Dr. Shawn Jackson, former Principal of Spencer Technology Academy, who was instrumental in transforming the school into a technology hub and who instituted parent engagement programs such as Parent University;

- Ms. Ozzie Itson, owner of Ozzie Itson's Daycare, an unwavering supporter of Austin's children and parents over the past several decades, who, at age 75, earned a CDA (Child Development Associate's Degree), with honors, from Malcolm X College; and
- VOCEL, a newly formed Austin childcare center that focuses on language development and open, experiential learning. VOCEL was founded by former Teach for America staff members Kelly Lambrinatos and Jesse Ilhardt.

Resource Fair

Twenty-five vendors registered for tables at the Symposium's Resource Fair, and twenty-two were present at the Symposium.

The following seventeen vendors paid the \$50 vendor registration fee:

- Bethel New Life
- Coalition for Community Banking
- Country Financial
- Dominican University
- Erikson Institute
- Kingdom Community, Inc.
- McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership
- North Park University
- Paychex, Inc.
- State Senator Kimberly Lightford
- Voices for Illinois Children
- University of Illinois Extension
- Wells Fargo
- YWCA
- PJ Financial
- CS Insurance*
- State Farm Insurance*

The following eight vendors offered an in-kind contribution in lieu of the \$50 vendor fee:

- Chicago Children's Museum – 50 free passes
- Gateways Registry – Entered Symposium hours into participants' PDRs
- INCCRRA/Mark Obuchowski – Registered participants on Gateways Registry
- Loretto Hospital – Use of auditorium for upcoming Townhall meeting
- Pyramid Players Productions
- Rape Victim Advocates – Future workshop

- Walgreen's
- Nelspa*

The three vendors marked with an asterisk (*) were not present at the Symposium. In-kind contributions were not delineated for two vendors: Pyramid Players Productions, and Walgreen's.

Evaluations

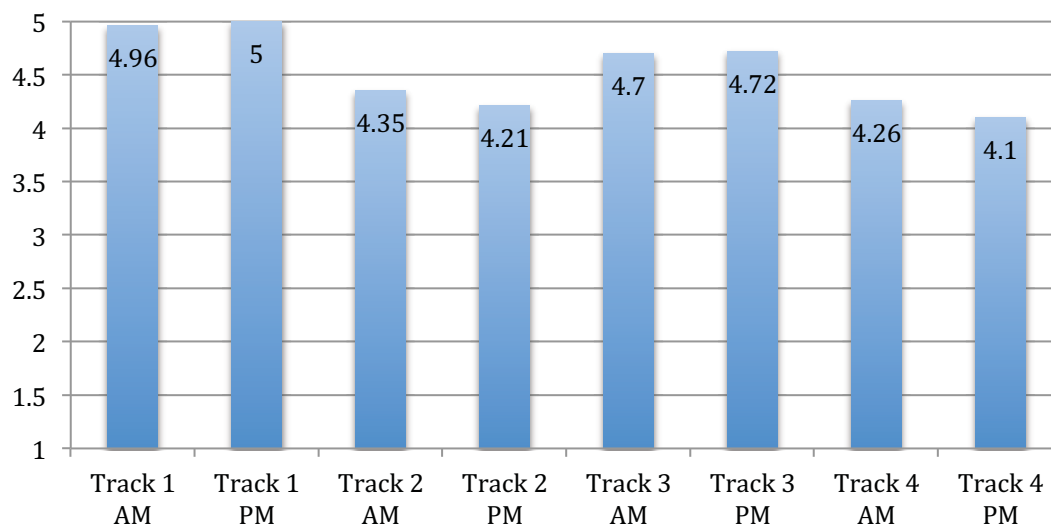
Evaluations were distributed to all participants at the culmination of sixteen of the eighteen workshops; in two workshops, they were inadvertently not distributed. In addition, a Symposium evaluation was included in participants' registration packets and collected at the end of the day. It was intended that the Symposium evaluation would serve as participants' "exit ticket," to be turned in to volunteers when participants picked up their attendance certificates at the end of the day; however, this was not communicated appropriately to volunteers, and only 96 Symposium evaluations were collected.

Workshop Evaluations

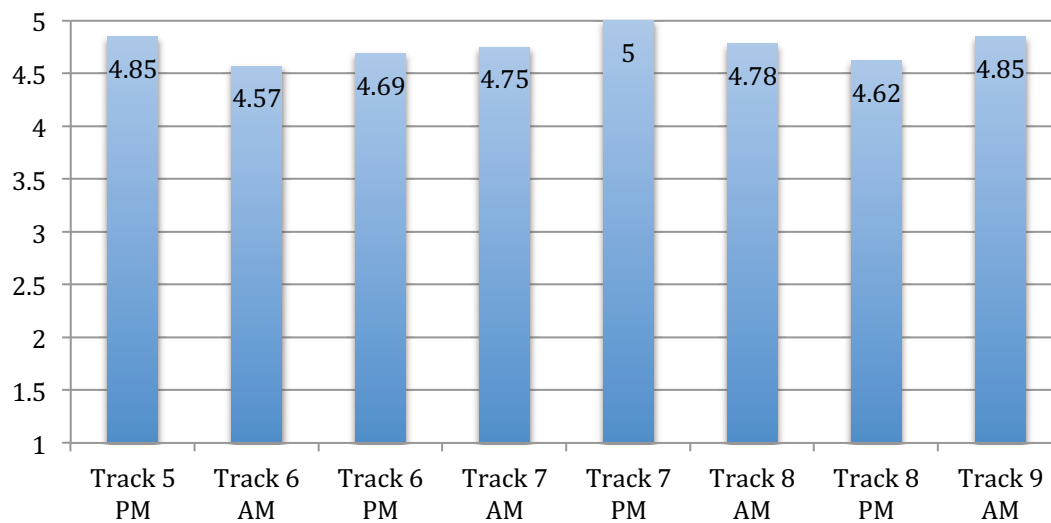
Evaluation data were collected from sixteen of the eighteen workshops; in the other two sessions, the facilitators inadvertently neglected to hand out the evaluation forms. Quantitative data included fourteen questions on a 5-point Likert scale; in addition, qualitative data were collected from three questions that invited open-ended responses.

The average score on the Likert-scale questions was above 4 for all sixteen workshops for which data were collected. Average scores ranged from a low of 4.10 to a high of 5.00 on the 5-point scale. It should be noted that all four of the workshops whose average score fell below 4.50 had at least one evaluation on which the respondent had circled "1" (the lowest value) for all fourteen quantitative questions. Due to the relatively small number of participants in each of these workshops, these low scores skewed their average scores downward. Further, as none of these low-scoring evaluations included any criticisms or suggestions in the responses to the open-ended questions – in fact, one such evaluation included the comment "Great workshop!" -- it is possible that the participants misinterpreted the scale and intended to rate the workshops highly. However, this cannot be assumed, so the scores were recorded as written.

Evaluations: Tracks 1-4



Evaluations: Tracks 5-9



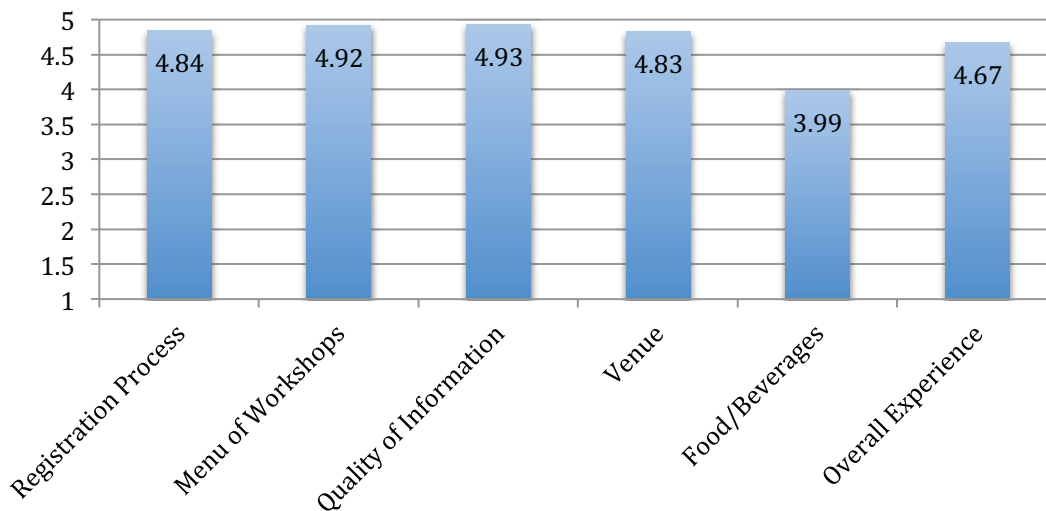
Symposium Evaluations

The overall Symposium evaluation asked participants to rate each of five facets of the event on a 5-point Likert scale; participants were also asked what additional topics they would like to learn about at future professional development sessions, and what suggestions they had for improving the Symposium in upcoming years.

The following data summarize the average rating for each facet of the Symposium:

- Registration process: 4.84
- Menu of workshops: 4.92
- Quality of information presented: 4.93
- Venue: 4.83
- Food and Beverages: 3.99
- Overall Symposium experience: 4.67

Overall Symposium Evaluation



There was a strong correlation between low scores on the “Food and Beverage” question and lower scores on the “Overall Symposium Experience” question: it is likely, then, that the average of the Overall Symposium Experience scores would have been substantially higher if participants had been happier with the food and beverages.

This observation is borne out by the suggestions for improvement: more than 1/3 of respondents noted that there were no beverages available after lunch; eight requested healthier and/or vegetarian food options; and three noted that the coffee ran out before the opening session started. In addition, three respondents stated that the auditorium and/or gym were too chilly; three indicated that the online registration system was difficult to navigate; two asked for more workshops in

Spanish; and one wanted to be able to choose two separate workshops, instead of registering for one Track.

There were also a number of complimentary comments, reflecting the high marks on four of the five survey items: seven respondents wrote “great conference” or a close variant; three wrote “no suggestions”; four complimented the workshops, facilitators, and/or conference personnel; and two indicated that they liked the resource fair and wanted it enlarged next year.

The suggestions for future workshop topics included ADHD, autism, behavior problems, brain development, physical development, working with parents, navigating the Gateways credentialing system, and more workshops in Spanish.

Detailed results of workshop and Symposium evaluations are included in the Appendix to this report.

Budget

Total expenses for the Symposium were \$7,381.89, broken down as follows:

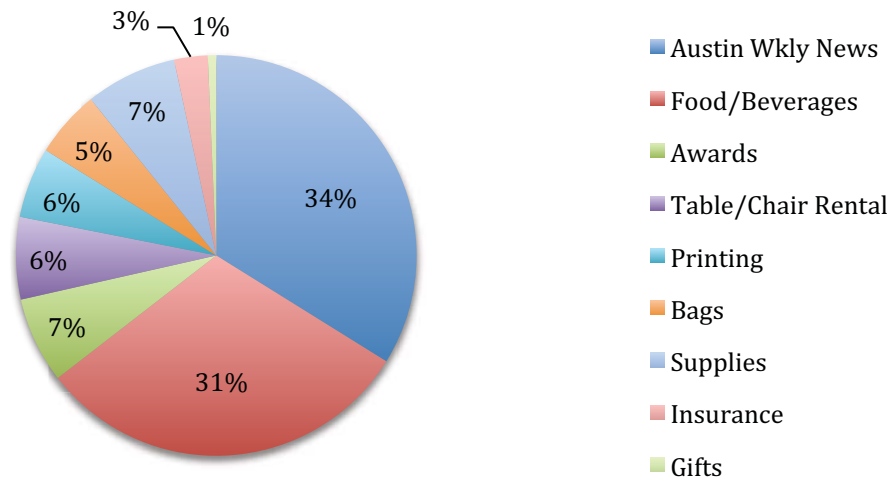
- \$2,500.00 Austin Weekly News special section
- \$2,263.23 Food and beverages
- \$ 512.00 Awards
- \$ 490.00 Table and chair rental
- \$ 420.60 Printing
- \$ 401.00 Conference Bags
- \$ 545.06 Supplies
- \$ 200.00 Insurance
- \$ 50.00 Gifts

Total revenues were \$7,646.00, broken down as follows:

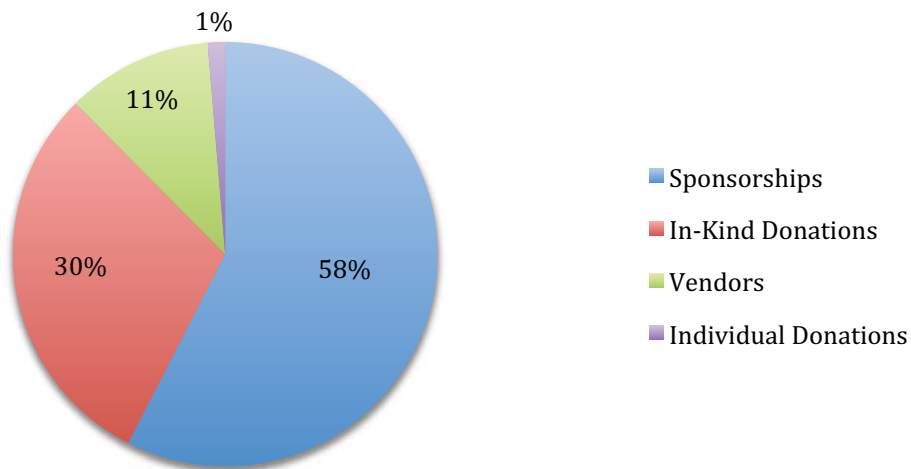
- \$4,400 Sponsorships
- \$2,295 In-kind donations
- \$ 850 Vendors
- \$ 101 Individual contributions

Thus, the Symposium garnered a surplus of \$264.11

Expenses



Revenues



Lessons Learned

Debriefing and reflection on the Symposium took place in two stages. First, in the week following the event, the four main planners – Andrew Born, Darnell Shields, and Amy Voege of Austin Coming Together, and Ruth Kimble, Chair of the Austin

Early Childhood Collaborative – met to debrief verbally. Second, during the week of October 20-24, Project Manager Voegel held phone conversations and/or e-mail exchanges with a purposive sample of individuals who were present at the Symposium in various roles: attendee, presenter, panelist, vendor, and volunteer. In this phase of the Symposium follow-up, feedback was solicited from the following people:

- Kelly Lambrinos (attendee)
- Jesse Ilhardt (attendee)
- Lenita Edgeworth (attendee)
- Margaret Johnson (attendee and panelist)
- Durriyyah Kemp (vendor)
- Ben Mueller (vendor)
- Melanie Garrett (volunteer)
- Sara Anderson (volunteer)
- Emily Hoffman (presenter and volunteer)
- Colleen Whittingham (presenter and volunteer)
- Samina Hadi-Tabassum (presenter and volunteer)
- Jacqueline Hester (presenter and volunteer)

During the debriefing and reflection, one overall impression and five major themes emerged. Each will be described below in detail. For easy reference, a much shorter bulleted list of “best practices and lessons learned” is included in the Appendix to this report.

Overall Impression: The overall impression of each individual involved in the debriefing and reflection process was that the Symposium was highly successful.

1. The process developed for labeling and distributing Gateways Registry certificates was successful. One of the most logistically challenging aspects of the Symposium was the necessity to accurately record, on Gateways Registry-approved certificates, the activities in which each attendee participated, and to return the certificates to participants at the end of the day. For the vast majority of attendees, the Symposium provided a way to accrue several hours’ worth of conference credit which they could apply toward DCFS licensing requirements: thus, leaving the Symposium with the certificate as proof of their participation was critical.

For each of the four major activities -- the panel discussion, the workshop sessions, and the keynote address -- s/he attended, a participant received a Gateways Registry

label on her/his certificate. During the closing session, the Gateways Registry staff present at the Symposium scanned the labels on each participant's certificate, automatically entering the relevant hours of credit on her/his Professional Development Record.

The two most challenging aspects of this process were: 1) accurately recording which sessions were attended by each participant (including which specific workshop Track s/he attended); and 2) returning the certificates quickly and efficiently to the nearly 200 participants following the whole-group sessions (the opening panel discussion and the keynote/awards ceremony which concluded the day).

A complex process was developed in which certificates were handed over to volunteers as entrance tickets to each activity and then returned to participants, with the appropriate labels affixed, at the end of each activity. Communicating this system to participants was of critical importance in order to avoid confusion and concern among the attendees. By all accounts, the process worked extremely well, with one relatively minor exception: it appears that about half a dozen attendees who arrived too late to earn credit for attending the panel discussion were mistakenly given attendance labels for the panel when they requested them near the end of the day. Informal conversations conducted by the Project Manager with approximately twenty randomly selected participants throughout the day indicated that attendees felt comfortable with the process and that they had received consistent explanations of it from workshop volunteers and presenters. This perception was borne out in the debriefing process, when all respondents questioned about the certificates indicated that they felt the process ran smoothly.

2. *Participants wanted healthier food choices and more beverages.* Both phases of the debriefing included comments about the need for healthier food and a larger supply of beverages. It was noted that the coffee brought as part of the catered continental breakfast ran out early, and not only participants but also presenters were left without coffee. The major issue raised was the absence of water and other beverages during and after lunch, with the exception of a small container of juice included in each boxed lunch. Prior to the Symposium, the Coca-Cola Company had donated 600 beverages – water and soda – which had been picked up by Symposium staff but, due to a miscommunication, were not brought to the Symposium. This left attendees, presenters, and volunteers without beverages during the afternoon. Compounding the problem was the unexpected revelation that no disposable cups had been brought (nor were there any at By the Hand Club that could have been “borrowed” and replaced), so the option of filling cups at the drinking fountain was

not available. Ultimately, a volunteer drove to a nearby store to purchase bottles of water for distribution to afternoon presenters.

The consensus of the event's four-person planning committee is that the absence of beverages in the afternoon was a fluke occurrence that is not likely to be repeated in future events. However, several other issues related to food and beverages bear consideration: 1) it is important to provide ample coffee, preferably throughout the day; 2) there should be a few vegetarian meals available at each event, as several vegetarian volunteers and participants were left without lunch; 3) candy was bought prior to the Symposium, and was to be distributed to each classroom before the afternoon workshop sessions, but it was not distributed; and 4) future Symposia should have a Hospitality Room reserved for presenters, volunteers, and staff, and food and drinks should be available there.

3. The high percentage of “no-shows” continues to be a problem.

During the Symposium's planning stages, the planning team set a “stretch” goal to register at least 300 participants, and a minimum goal to have at least 200 actual attendees. While the pre-registration goal was met, the total number of attendees (181) was a disappointment.

Pre-registration

A concerted effort was made to publicize the Symposium to childcare providers throughout Austin and to extend the event's reach beyond the borders of the community. ACT intern Deborah Jones engaged in a targeted publicity campaign: leaving flyers at schools, childcare businesses, and other relevant venues; calling individuals who had enrolled in previous AECC professional development offerings; and reaching out to early childhood organizations in neighboring communities. In addition, the planning team and AECC members actively distributed paper and electronic copies of the Symposium flyer to their networks of professional contacts. The Symposium was also listed on the Gateways Registry's calendar of Registry-Approved conferences.

This effort appears to have been quite successful, as pre-registration reached 300 one week prior to the Symposium, and as the geographic distribution of registrants – while still weighted heavily toward Austin – ranged farther than at any previous AECC event.

No-shows

The relatively high percentage of pre-registrants who did not attend the Symposium is emblematic of an ongoing concern, held over from the Social Emotional Learning professional development series held by the AECC in the spring of 2014. In each of those workshops, an average of 67% to 70% of pre-registrants actually attended. An intentional effort to decrease the number of no-shows was made prior to the Symposium, consisting of two strategies:

- ACT intern Deborah Jones attempted to contact all individuals who had registered for more than one workshop track, in order to ascertain which track they preferred and cancel their registration(s) for other tracks. She was able to cancel approximately twenty extra registrations as a result of this effort.
- Ms. Jones also called all pre-registrants in the week prior to the Symposium, primarily to confirm their attendance and also to convey important logistical information about Gateways Registry requirements.

In spite of these strong efforts, it appears that this strategy was not particularly successful in increasing the overall rate of attendance, although it definitely decreased the number of multiple-track registrations. Fewer than half a dozen pre-registrants actually cancelled their registrations as a result of the confirmation call. A major issue reported by Ms. Jones was the difficulty of talking directly to people: in a large proportion of her phone calls, her only alternative was to leave a voicemail message. A lesson learned is that it is probably not worth the large investment of time to make confirmation calls to all pre-registrants.

The question of how to increase the percentage of pre-registrants who actually attend events such as the Symposium remains. This is not simply an academic question; rather, it has major practical implications for event planning. For example, the planners felt that they needed to have enough conference materials for 300 participants, and so a large number of conference bags, programs, certificates, nametags and other materials went unused. Also, approximately 100 extra lunches were ordered and sent home with participants at the end of the day. Additionally, workshop presenters ended up with substantially fewer participants than they had anticipated. Moving forward, the planning team will need to continue to grapple with the issue of building congruence between pre-registration rolls and attendance.

4. Volunteers should be recruited early, and key volunteers should be trained to take on “team lead” roles.

The members of the planning team shared the sense that greater attention should be paid to both recruitment and training of volunteers for future Symposia.

Recruitment

Recruitment of volunteers did not begin until mid-September. By early October, there were only about a dozen volunteers registered on the Google registration form. Symposium staff issued an urgent e-mail to AECC members asking them to actively recruit more volunteers, and by the day of the Symposium enough helpers had been engaged to cover the minimum needs for the day.

However, the process of assigning volunteers to tasks/roles on the day of the Symposium was perceived as chaotic by at least two members of the planning team. Some volunteers who had signed up in advance did not show up, and others arrived later than they had said they would. This meant that the planning team had to reassign other volunteers to cover key roles, and the detailed spreadsheet of volunteers and roles put together in the days prior to the Symposium was abandoned within the first hour of the registration period. Several AECC members who were present as volunteers stepped up to fill gaps throughout the day. It appears that attendees, presenters, and vendors did not sense any gaps in support. Two volunteers expressed during their debriefing conversations that they were aware that the volunteer situation was a bit chaotic; however, the tenor of their statements indicated that they did not perceive the situation to be overly stressful, nor as stressful as members of the planning team perceived it to be.

Lessons learned about volunteer recruitment included the following:

- Begin recruiting much earlier. Ideally, ACT as a whole should develop and implement a plan to cultivate a core group of volunteers (both individuals and groups) who will be likely to assist at multiple ACT events throughout the year. The AECC should recruit additional people likely to volunteer for AECC events.
- Ensure that, at least one month prior to the Symposium, planners have an accurate list of **key** volunteers and the times when they will be available.
- Ensure that, by two days prior to the Symposium, planners have an accurate list of **all** volunteers and the times when they will be available.

Training

Initially, the planning team intended to identify key volunteers and train them, prior to the Symposium, to fill important roles, such as registration, workshop support,

and vendor support. Two factors affected this plan: first, because many volunteers, including AECC members, did not sign up on the online registration page, the planners did not know until a day or two before the Symposium who the key volunteers would be; second, at the monthly AECC meeting on the Thursday before the Symposium, the planners' attempt to train several key AECC volunteers was derailed when all the AECC members present were diverted to putting together registration packets. The planners then decided to train volunteers between 7:30 and 8:00 am on the day of the Symposium; however, a large number of attendees arrived early and were unexpectedly admitted to the building. In an attempt to ensure that these early arrivals went through the registration process properly, the volunteer training was abandoned in favor of processing registrations.

Lessons learned about volunteer training included the following:

- Identify key volunteers well in advance and assign them to managerial roles: e.g., one volunteer to oversee registration; another to oversee workshop support; etc.
- Train these key volunteers several days prior to the Symposium. Each should understand her/his assigned facet of the work thoroughly enough that s/he should not have to rely on planning committee members to answer questions or handle issues that arise. This will allow planning committee members to "float" and handle any unexpected problems.
- On the day of the Symposium, have volunteers arrive at least one hour before attendees are admitted to the building, and have each group trained by its "manager-volunteer."
- Prior to the Symposium, assign volunteers to roles based on their experience, expertise, and abilities.

5. The planning committee's systems of communication and decision-making, while overall highly effective, could benefit from some fine-tuning.

The final theme was addressed in the planning committee's initial debriefing session, and did not come up in the second phase of debriefing. The seven-month process of planning the Symposium required countless acts of communication among team members and dozens of decisions, small and large. The process was complicated by the fact that one member of the planning team (Ruth Kimble) and her staff worked from one location, while the other three team members worked from the ACT office; however, the geographic separation was minimized by regular communication (often multiple times per day) via e-mail and phone. Taken as a whole, the communication among the four members of the planning team was rich, productive, and highly effective.

While acknowledging the general efficacy of its overall patterns of work, the planning committee also recognized several ways in which a more systematic and planned approach to communication and decision-making could streamline and smooth the process of preparing for future Symposia.

Communication within the planning committee

The key lesson learned was that consistent communication among all four members of the planning committee was critical to avoid misunderstandings and to ensure that details were not forgotten and/or efforts duplicated. A highly effective strategy adopted by the group in early September and maintained throughout the rest of the planning process was to hold a bi-weekly conference call in which five people – the four members of the planning committee and Margaret Johnson, a key member of Ruth Kimble’s staff -- participated. These calls discussed, in exhaustive detail, the status of Symposium planning and the next steps in the planning effort; important decisions were made and tasks were allocated to each committee member. Following each call, one member of the committee wrote detailed notes and task assignments and e-mailed them to the others. The effectiveness of this strategy diminished markedly on the one conference call at which not all committee members were present: a fairly important decision was made by the three people present and not communicated to the other two members of the group; additionally, it was difficult to brief absent members on the status of projects and the allocation of tasks.

Deciding which members of the planning team to include in day-to-day communications posed a challenge, as well. Some team members consistently used “Reply All” on e-mails in order to keep the entire team apprised of conversations and decisions, while others chose not to use “Reply All,” but rather to respond individually as the situation warranted. The latter strategy had the effect, whether intended or not, of sending different – and sometimes diametrically opposed – messages to various team members, which led to confusion and uncertainty. An important lesson to be taken from this experience is that it may be preferable to risk inundating team members with information than to take some members out of the communication loop. An additional safeguard might be to appoint a team member as a “communications clearinghouse” (to be copied in on all e-mails) and to charge that individual with alerting the rest of the committee when it appears that two or more members have differing understandings of important issues.

Decision-making within the planning committee

Planning the Symposium also required the committee to make dozens of decisions, large and small. On the whole, decision-making was a harmonious process in which the committee reached consensus and took action accordingly. Not surprisingly, there were also many decisions made and implemented by individual committee members without consulting the others. In such cases, it was crucial that the committee member in question be able to accurately predict other members' thoughts and feelings regarding the issue in question and to take these into account during the decision-making process. In at least one case during the Symposium planning, a committee member made a relatively major decision without consulting the rest of the team, and later the other three members disagreed and overrode the decision. This was not a comfortable situation for any of the committee members, and it led to discussion of the necessity to clarify who was ultimately responsible for making such decisions. It was agreed that, in the future, it would be optimal to assign ultimate decision-making authority over various aspects of the Symposium to different committee members (e.g., one member might have final responsibility for making decisions about volunteers; another about food, beverages, and hospitality; a third might be responsible for vetting and approving all advertising and publicity). As the group reflected, it became evident that the absence of a clear chain of authority and responsibility had led to a number of mid-stream changes throughout the seven-month planning process which had added chaos to the process and which may have steered the Symposium away from the AECC's initial vision of a broad-based event inclusive of families and community members in addition to childcare providers.

Next Steps

The debriefing process also opened the door to rich discussion about what the AECC's next steps should be and what the 2015 Austin Early Childhood Symposium should look like. Comments included the following:

- "Include activities and workshops geared to all early childhood stakeholders -- parents, grandparents, teachers, home visitors, etc. – and not just to childcare providers."
- "The Symposium creates a lot of momentum and energy around the professionalization of early childhood in Austin. . . In an effort to make that excitement more sustainable, it might be helpful to either cap the number of participants at a number that we can continue to follow up with throughout the year, or charge a few dollars to attend, which may encourage participation from attendees who are committed to professional development, as well as help supplement our funds to allow a more consistent presence in the community throughout the year."

- “It is important to revisit the mission and vision of the organization and either confirm our commitment as it stands, or rewrite the vision to reflect the goals of current membership. AECC as a component of ACT was developed in light of a Cradle to College model, one which has had success in Harlem because of its comprehensive approach to support. In the last two years of membership, interest in supporting parents, schools, and administrators has waxed and waned while support of providers has continued to grow. We seem to be at a crossroads needing some resolve - will we continue to focus our energies on providers solely, and develop a systematic and sustainable plan to support their professional development, or do we have the resources to commit ourselves to this level of support for providers while also focusing attention and energies on other populations of influence in the lives of young children in Austin? Neither is the clear answer, but focusing our direction will certainly help move the presence of AECC forward.”
- “I think that the goal of the symposium needs to be clear. What is the real impact that you want the symposium to have, and did you achieve that? I think that this year's symposium was successful as a way to alert the Austin provider community that this organization exists. If the goal was to have an event that focused on alerting providers of the AECC network, I think that was achieved. I think that providers are aware of us as a resource, which should open the door to collaboration with this population in the future.”
- “If the goal of the symposium was to provide professional development to Austin early childcare providers, then it was successful in a very limited way. Yes, providers may be introduced to some new strategies to use in the classroom and have achieved some Gateway credit - but will this impact what is going on in early childhood classrooms? I think in the future, a symposium of this nature would be great as a 'start of the year' rally. Use it to get providers excited about the PD offered in the year ahead. Then, offer systemic knowledge building PD throughout the year. We know that that is the way in which to really improve instruction in early childhood classrooms. Ideally, the symposium could be recruitment for a community of practice with coaching style of PD. Ask providers who attend the symposium if they are interested in a year-long PD where coaches would go into their classroom and help them implement instructional strategies. In conjunction with this, participants would participate in regular community of practice sessions with their peers where they exchange challenges, ideas, and thoughts on their own professional growth. . . we need to get some targeted funding and recruit some excellent ECE coaches to help implement effective ECE instruction in classrooms. Of course, this is only the provider side of the

AECC goals. To make a much larger impact, all community members need to be involved. This means more involvement of parents, receiving schools, principals, daycare directors, etc.”

Conclusion

The 2nd annual Austin Early Childhood Symposium built on the successes of the 2013 Symposium and the Early Learning Professional Development workshop series held in the winter and spring of 2014; it also represented a major expansion of the AECC’s efforts to provide high-quality professional development opportunities to childcare providers in Austin and beyond. The next step for the Austin Early Childhood Collaborative is to reflect on the success of the Symposium and use the lessons learned as a springboard to discussion and action: revisiting the organization’s mission, vision, and values; developing a mid- to long-term strategic plan; and planning and implementing a coordinated set of activities for 2015.

Appendix

Itinerary for Early Childhood Symposium
Saturday, October 11, 2014

8:00-8:30	Entry for vendors and presenters via Gym door
8:30-9:00	Lobby: Registration/check-in Gym: Continental breakfast
9:00-10:30	Auditorium <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome (9:00-9:15)• Screening of “Raising of America” (9:15-9:30)• Panel discussion (9:30-10:30)
10:45-12:15	Workshop Session I – Breakout Rooms
12:15-1:00	Gym: Lunch and vendors
1:00-2:30	Workshop Session II – Breakout Rooms
2:45-4:00	Auditorium <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keynote Address (2:45-3:15)• Awards Ceremony (3:15-3:45)• Closing (3:45-4:00)

Vendors in gym from 8:30 – 4:00

2nd Annual Austin Early Childhood Symposium
Building a Strong Foundation for Success
Workshop Descriptions

Track 1: Starting a Childcare Center

Learn the basics for starting your own childcare center, from nuts-and-bolts advice to navigating the Gateways professional development system.

Living Your Passion in Early Childhood Education

Presenter: Mark Obuchowski, INCCRRA

10:45am – 12:15pm Breakout Room 1

“Living your Passion” is a motivational and informational presentation that captures the initial passion all ECE professionals have to make a difference in the life of a child and harness that power into a plan for improving knowledge and skills needed to educate and care for children. By providing a comprehensive overview of Gateways to Opportunity®-- the professional development system in Illinois -- this presentation provides those attending with the information they need to move forward with their careers in ECE.

Opening a Quality Childcare Center in Illinois

Presenters: Ruth Kimble, Austin Childcare Providers Network

Jackie Hester, Positive Attitudes Working

1:00 – 2:30pm Breakout Room 1

Do you want to expand your business from a family childcare provider to a daycare center? Or maybe you just want to change your career and transition from working for someone else to owning and operating your own lucrative childcare business. This is the training for you! This informational session will provide a complete picture of the financial feasibility of opening a new center and sustaining the business over time. Learn how to design your program and identify your niche in the childcare industry from a seasoned daycare center owner who will share her insights and lay out the pros and cons of owning and operating a successful daycare center business in Illinois.

Track 2: Starting a Family Childcare Business

Learn how to start a family childcare business and how to use the Gateways Registry as a tool to keep your career on track.

Is a Home-Based Daycare Right for You?

Presenters: Kim Pickens, Austin Childcare Providers Network

Dollie Sherman, Austin Coming Together

10:45am – 12:15pm Breakout Room 2

Weigh the pros and cons of opening a home-based daycare business. Learn about State licensing requirements and what skills, education, and qualifications you should possess to be a successful childcare provider. This session will provide an

overview of reasons to start a home-based daycare, as well as things you should consider before deciding to open a home daycare business.

Are You Lost in the Missing Zone?

Presenter: Mark Obuchowski, INCCRRA

1:00 – 2:30pm

Breakout Room 2

The Gateways Registry helps **YOU** get on track! Keeping track of trainings, workshops, conferences, credentials and degrees is more important than ever. Good record keeping for licensing, accreditation, Quality Counts Quality Rating System and career advancement is a must. But, it's not always easy! "The Missing Zone" is that place where certificates for trainings, conference attendance, transcripts and other important documents just disappear. And, it seems... always at the most inopportune times. The Gateways Registry can change all that. This training shows you how to join the Registry and use this new resource and tool, a part of the Gateways statewide professional development system. The presentation helps you get out of the Missing Zone and get on track! Its focus is on how the Registry can help you get organized today.

Track 3: Quality Improvement in Your Childcare Business

Learn to use assessment tools like the PAS and BAS to evaluate your childcare business and drive continuous quality improvement.

Embracing Continuous Quality Improvement

Presenter: Safiyah Jackson, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership

10:45am – 12:15pm

Breakout Room 3

Continuous quality improvement is both a leadership philosophy and a set of techniques or processes for assessing organizational needs and implementing program improvement. While vision, mission, and performance are essential elements, this session goes further to explore a systematic approach to the quest for program excellence.

Using the Program Administration Scale and the Business Administration Scale to Enhance Family Engagement

Presenter: Linda Butkovich, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership

1:00-2:30pm

Breakout Room 3

All early childhood programs provide families with information, yet they may not be aware that the messages they communicate are sometimes ineffective and confusing. Some programs communicate a message that parents are partners, while others communicate a message that discourages involvement. Some programs miss opportunities to build a partnership during orientation, and that can set the tone for the rest of the year. This session explores strategies for helping center directors and family childcare providers strengthen their relationships with families.

Track 4: Early Literacy and Language Development (English)

Learn the most effective ways to help young children develop language and literacy skills.

TALK: Thinking about Language and Kids, Part 1

Presenters: Colleen Whittingham and Emily Hoffman, University of Illinois-Chicago
10:45am – 12:15pm Breakout Room 4

This workshop addresses young children's language and literacy development. Early childhood educators and parents will see examples of developmentally appropriate practice and take part in discussions to apply knowledge to different contexts and age groups. This interactive workshop is geared toward generating ideas, developing knowledge, identifying exemplary literacy resources, and discussing implementation of skills learned. Participants will walk away understanding how to best foster advancement in children's speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

TALK: Thinking about Language and Kids, Part 2

Presenters: Colleen Whittingham and Emily Hoffman, University of Illinois-Chicago
1:00 – 2:30pm Breakout Room 4

Continuation of morning workshop, building on ideas and concepts addressed in Part 1.

Track 5: Desarrollo del lenguaje y alfabetización temprano

Aprender las formas más efectivas para ayudar a los niños a desarrollar habilidades lingüísticas.

¡Dílo en Español! La importancia de la educación bilingüe

Presenter: Samina Hadi-Tabassum, Dominican University
10:45am – 12:15pm Breakout Room 5

Aprender las formas más efectivas para ayudar a los niños a desarrollar habilidades lingüísticas.

Buenos hábitos de lectura en el hogar

Presenter: Samina Hadi-Tabassum, Dominican University
1:00 – 2:30pm Breakout Room 5

Continuación del taller de mañana.

Track 6: Meeting the Needs of All Children

Learn about screening young children for developmental delays and creating a system of supports and interventions that ensure the successful development of all children.

Developmental Screening: The First Line of Defense in Supporting Children's Development

Presenter: Pamela Epley, Erikson Institute

10:45am – 12:15pm Breakout Room 6

Developmental screening of young children, from birth through the preschool years, is the first and best line of defense in identifying children who may need extra support or services. This workshop will explain the importance of early and ongoing screening and explain how developmental screening differs from more comprehensive assessments. Participants in this workshop will learn how to complete a developmental screening, how to interpret the results, and what “next steps” they can take.

Supporting All Children’s Growth Toward School Success

Presenter: Safiyah Jackson, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership

1:00 – 2:30pm Breakout Room 6

Across the nation there are driving forces working to ensure that all young children enter kindergarten prepared to experience positive outcomes. Along with this increased focus is a growing body of research-based practice that demonstrates all children can succeed when they experience a multi-dimensional approach to teaching, caregiving, and early intervening services. This session will explore the essential elements of a multi-tiered system of support for preK programs and practical ideas for aligning program practices.

Track 7: Working with Families of Young Children

Learn about strategies for building the parenting and leadership skills of the parents of infants, toddlers, and young children.

Tapping the Leadership Potential of Parents

Presenter: COFI

10:45am – 12:15pm Breakout Room 7

Parents can be strong allies for childcare businesses, and they also have strength in numbers as advocates for their children’s education and development. COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues) has been training and supporting Chicago parents to be powerful leaders for nearly twenty years. This workshop, which is well-suited for both parents and childcare professionals, introduces the COFI model for community organizing and describes practical ways in which families and childcare businesses can work together to advocate for the needs of young children.

Building Parental Capacity through Home Visiting

Presenter: Michelle Lee, Fussy Baby Network, Erikson Institute

1:00 – 2:30 pm Breakout Room 7

Many parents experience worries centered on their baby’s crying, sleeping, or feeding behaviors, and this can lead to stress for the parents and can even put babies at risk. The Fussy Baby Network has developed a home visiting model that helps parents with their urgent concerns about the behaviors of their infants and at the same time builds their confidence and long-term capacities for parenting. This

workshop can be useful for parents, childcare providers, and social service professionals who work with parents of infants.

Track 8: Trauma-Informed Childcare

Trauma, especially in the form of interpersonal, family, and/or community violence, affects many young children. Learn how to build resilience and help children heal from the effects of experiencing or witnessing violence.

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Resilience

Presenters: Kristin Bodiford, Dominican University; Marlita White, Chicago Safe Start

10:45am – 12:15pm Auditorium

Even the youngest children are not immune from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) – including divorce, domestic violence, abuse, community violence, poverty, and racism – that may have a traumatizing effect on them. This workshop describes a number of ACEs experienced by many of Austin’s young children and offers strategies for building resilience and helping children heal.

The Sanctuary Model for Building a Culture of Safety, Peace, and Well-Being

Renee Jackson, The Next Generation of Leaders; Lina Cramer, Wisdom Exchange

1:00 – 2:30pm Auditorium

This workshop will present an overview of the Sanctuary model, its Seven Sanctuary Commitments, and its practical tools for building organizational and community cultures that promote peace, safety, and well-being for all. The skills described here can be used by parents/guardians, childcare providers, community members, and social services workers to create safe and nurturing environments for young children who have experienced trauma.

Track 9: Social Emotional Learning

Learn how to help children develop strong social emotional skills and how to set up your classroom or childcare facility to promote children’s engagement and interaction, and prevent challenging behaviors.

Foundations that Promote Engagement and Prevent Challenging Behavior

Presenter: Katie Haffner, Teach for America

10:45 am – 12:15pm Breakout Room 8

In this session we will discuss children’s behaviors and the functions they serve, explore our feelings about challenging behavior and how we respond, and learn strategies for preventing challenging behavior. Participants will learn to create an environment and structure that promote children’s engagement throughout the day and keep them on-task and learning!

Teaching Social and Emotional Skills

Presenter: Katie Haffner, Teach for America

1:00 – 2:30pm

Breakout Room 8

Emotional literacy and emotional intelligence are “soft skills” every child needs to be successful in life. In this session we will build on the foundation set in Session 1 and take a deep dive into concrete strategies for teaching the social and emotional skills our children need. We will focus specifically on how to help children express and regulate their emotions, control anger, and solve social problems with their peers.

Summary of Lessons Learned and Best Practices

Registration and Attendance

- The Track system was confusing to some registrants
- It was very helpful to collect information about registrants' roles (home CC provider, Center-based CC provider, parent, etc.) and workplaces
- Make sure to collect all contact information from walk-ins
- We need to develop a better strategy for dealing with the large percentage of no-shows

Food, Venue

- It's important to have plenty of coffee, preferably throughout the day
- Cold drinks: bottled water, soda, and/or juice at lunch and afterward
- Make sure to include healthy options, such as fruits and vegetables, whole wheat bread, and a few vegetarian meals
- Overall, it is probably worth it to spend a little extra money in order to get high-quality food
- We regularly receive a few complaints about BTH being too cold.

Presenter Support

- It would be helpful to have a Hospitality Room set up with food and beverages for presenters and comfortable chairs to relax in
- The tech support was greatly appreciated by presenters

Volunteers

- Develop a strategic plan for recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers
- Begin recruitment for events three months before event
- Train key volunteers to be team leaders for: registration, workshop support, tech support, vendor support, etc.
- Have a sign-in sheet for volunteers so we know who actually came

Planning Team: Communication and Decision-Making

- Weekly conference calls were an excellent strategy
- Assign specific area(s) to each planning team member early in the process (e.g., one person recruits, trains, and manages volunteers; one handles all registration processes; etc.)
- Establish clear policy for intra-group communication



Austin Coming Together

proACTIVE community building

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday September 10, 2014

Contact:
Amy Voege: 773-417-8601
avoege@austincomingtogether.org

“Building a Strong Foundation for Success”, The 2nd Annual Austin Early Childhood Symposium, to be held on Saturday October 11th

CHICAGO – Furthering its commitment to enriching the whole child and their families from birth to age eight, the Austin Early Childhood Collaborative (AECC), an initiative of Austin Coming Together, is holding its second annual Early Childhood Symposium. This event is free and being held Saturday, October 11, 8:00 AM-4:00 PM at By the Hand Club, 415 North Laramie Avenue.

This year the AECC is attempting to bring attention to how early experiences in a child’s life influence their future success. As a result, the AECC has chosen to entitle this year’s Symposium, “Building a Strong Foundation for Success.” The event will feature a panel discussion, high quality workshops, and an awards ceremony to celebrate excellence in early childhood care and education. Workshop presenters and panelists include representatives from Erikson Institute, UIC Reading Clinic, University of Illinois Extension, The Ounce of Prevention, Voices for Illinois Children, COFI, Dominican University and Illinois Action for Children. Space is limited, so participants must register by October 3rd. To register, call 773/417-8610 or visit <https://aecs Symposium2.eventbrite.com>. Detailed descriptions of each workshop and complete information are available on this site.

The Symposium is made possible by the efforts of AECC members, as well as special support from the Illinois State Board of Education, State Representative La Shawn K. Ford, the Austin Childcare Providers’ Network, By the Hand Club, Austin Weekly News, CS Insurance, and Coca-Cola.

The AECC is coordinated by Austin Coming Together, whose mission is to increase the collective impact of our member organizations on education and economic development outcomes in the Austin community. More information can be found online at <https://aecs Symposium2.eventbrite.com>.

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Oct. 8, 2014

Early Learning *MATTERS!*

Building a Strong Foundation for Success



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RAISING OUR YOUNG CHILDREN PAGE 5 | HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT PAGE 6

THE AECC AWARDEES PAGE 7





Would you like to work in a childcare environment or own your own childcare business?

Austin Childcare Providers' Network offers job training and technical support for working with children ages 0-12 years old.

We provide startup information to first time business owners and work with you to achieve your goal of being an entrepreneur.

For more information about classes and more, please call Margaret at 773.379.7627

Certificates of Participation will be given.

 Austin Childcare
Providers Network



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Illinois Senator Don Harmon, 39th District
6933 W. North Ave., Oak Park, IL 60302
Work (708)848-2002 | Fax (708)848-2022

Illinois Representative Camille Lilly
5755 W. Division St. Chicago IL, 60651
(773)473- 3700 | staterepcamilleylilly@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Austin

Children's early experiences shape their ability to learn and develop into healthy and productive adults. Young children need loving and caring relationships with adults, safe homes and neighborhoods, and opportunities to learn. It truly takes a community to raise a child.

In Austin, community leaders - parents, educators, childcare providers, business owners, and elected officials - are coming together to ensure that children and families have the supports they need in order to thrive. Schools and childcare businesses are being transformed into vibrant centers of learning; parents and grandparents are fostering nurturant home environments; and community members are organizing to build safe and supportive neighborhoods.

The following stories profile several of the leaders of this movement and the work they are doing to transform early childhood care and education in Austin. I hope that you will consider joining us in our work to secure a healthy future for all of Austin's children!

Ruth Kimble

Ruth Kimble
Chair
Austin Early Childhood
Collaborative

The AECC: A well of hope for Austin's young children and those who raise them

By Michael Romain

Since its inception, the Austin Early Childhood Collaborative (AECC) has been an indispensable reservoir of information, resources and support for the parents, teachers, caregivers and childcare providers responsible for raising Austin's future generations.

Formed in 2012 as a branch of the community building organization Austin Coming Together (ACT), AECC is the result of a rich collaboration between a diverse group of community members and partner organizations within and outside of Austin. Key organizational partners include the Austin Childcare Providers Network and Erikson Institute.

The purpose of the AECC is to create and sustain a seamless, accessible and high-quality support system for children, ages 0 to 8, and their families. To do this, the AECC is committed to a range of core values that include placing children first, empowering parents and primary caregivers to become children's first teachers, nurturing healthy and transparent relationships with community stakeholders, and building a network of accountable, team-based leadership.

The whole idea behind the AECC is to give voice to Austin's caregivers and child advocates and mobilize the people, institutions, and funding needed to enhance their ability to nurture and educate young children. There are countless community members that give children the love, attention, knowledge, and skills they need, but many times their abilities are constrained by broader



DAVID PIERINI/Staff Photographer

Lead VOCEL teacher Jesse Ilhardt settles a dispute during play time.

systemic issues. Whether it's a lack of resources, a dysfunctional public support system, or policies that don't make sense for our community, AECC wants to tackle the bigger picture problems that prohibit nurturers and providers from making a bigger impact on their children's lives.

In 2014, AECC partners provided more than 1,000 hours of free professional development and training to over 150 caregivers in Austin. The AECC's flagship project is its annual Early Childhood Symposium, which features panel discussions, informative workshops and an awards ceremony that acknowledges individuals and

organizations that are vanguards in promoting early childhood development in the community. The theme for AECC's 2014 Symposium is "Building a Strong Foundation for Success." This theme was chosen because effective early childhood education not only builds the foundation for success in the individual lives of children; it also builds the foundation for community change and restoration. Many issues that arise later in a child's life, like dropping out of school, unemployment, violence, and drug abuse, can be prevented by providing them with nurturing, stable, and stimulating environments during their early years.

The AECC strives to instill this message with providers and other community leaders, and mobilize the community around this cause.

"In the future, we hope to engage more and more community members and continue to mobilize resources around young children and their families," says Andrew Born, ACT's Director of Programs and Development. "There are many systemic issues yet to be addressed like access to healthcare, home visiting services, school systems, unemployment, and mass incarceration. As we build our capacity as an organization, we hope to take on more issues that impact our young learners' readiness for school and the rest of their lives."



Chairman, Small Business Empowerment & Workforce Development Committee • Chairman, Restorative Justice Committee • Vice-Chairman, Health Care Availability & Accessibility Committee • Member, Appropriations-Human Services Committee • Member, Veteran's Affairs Committee

La Shawn K. Ford

La Shawn K. Ford
8th Legislative District
State Representative



Raising our young children



Finding partners to offer help

By Michael Romain

"This year, we focused on bringing awareness to employers in the Austin community and surrounding areas so they could understand why it's important to nurture the right social and emotional skills in young people at a very early age," said Durriyyah Kemp, chair of the AECC's Community Engagement Committee and a community health educator with the University of Illinois Extension.

Kemp and her team have worked to educate local businesses and the larger community on why early childhood development and education should be a concern even for people who aren't parents and may not be directly involved in caring for children.

"We've found numerous research done with current business leaders and employers suggesting that people come

into the workforce with the hard skills to do the job, but they often lack the social and emotional skills to be successful," Kemp said. "Team skills, leadership skills, the ability to manage your emotions effectively and to work together with other people are important. This is why we should get behind early childhood education and make business leaders and employers aware of its importance to them and their workforce."

To that end, the AECC's Community Engagement Committee will collaborate with Loretto Hospital to host a screening of a new documentary called "The Raising of America," which illustrates the larger societal significance of early childhood development and education. After the screening, community members will participate in a town hall discussion about the film and the issues it covers.

Supporting families as they raise their kids

By Michael Romain

"One of our goals this year was to find ways to reach out to parents in Austin and get them to join the table," said Sara Anderson, a staff clinician at the Erikson Institute and the co-chair of the AECC's Family Engagement Committee.

To that end, the AECC launched a partnership this year with Commu-

nity Organizing and Family Issues (COFI), an organization that has been turning everyday residents into grassroots leaders for 19 years.

"What made me realize the importance of early learning and [deep parental] engagement was when I started having children over 40 years ago," said Gloria Harris, a parent peer trainer with COFI who is also a proud product

of the kind of training that other parents will undergo through the AECC/COFI partnership.

"I had 12 kids and they all went to early learning programs," she said. "The brain works more actively between the ages of 0 to 5 than at any other time in a person's life. If we can get kids to learn in positive social, mental and physical environments at young ages, then we may be able to lower the dropout rate."

Between September and early October, the COFI/AECC collaboration will recruit and train approximately 30 parents -- one group comprising 15-20 parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and another group comprising 15-20 parents of children in grades K-3.

Since the AECC understands that not all Austin parents will be able to participate in this intense training, it also supports similar projects, namely the Erikson Institute's Parent Cafes, from which many more

A cooking activity at Channing's Childcare Academy.

DAVID PIERINI/Staff Photographer



parents, childcare providers, teachers, caregivers and other members of the community can benefit.

"Parent Cafes are a good way to bring parents together informally over a nice meal to talk about early childhood and gain support from professionals in the field," Anderson said. The Parent Cafes are hosted by staff at the Erikson Institute and are held at DePriest

Elementary, 139 S. Parkside, from 8-9am on Mondays; and at Channing's Childcare Academy, 5701 W. Division, from 4-5pm on Tuesdays. They are informal weekly drop-in sessions in which parents can share a meal, talk about challenges and victories in their parenting, and get feedback and information from professionals in the field of early childhood.

Healthy development of your young children

Tools to help young children overcome trauma

By La Risa Lynch

Acting out, constant crying and fighting may seem like signs of a tantrum, but those behaviors may indicate children who have experienced some form of trauma.

Trauma goes beyond the gun violence which dominates headlines, says University of Chicago professor Bradley C. Stolbach. Trauma ranges from domestic violence, drug addicted parents, having an incarcerated parent, or being placed in foster care to gang violence or being involved in a car accident.

"Many children, particularly in some communities in Chicago, have been exposed to trauma [and] violence even if they haven't been directly injured," said Stolbach, a project director of Trauma-Informed Care for Youth Injured by Violence. "They have their daily lives shaped by it."

Ruth Kimble, owner of Channing's Child-care Academy and chair of the Austin Early Childhood Collaborative (AECC), believes day-care operators are the first line of defense to spot behavioral issues associated with trauma.

"We have kids that when they are acting out sometimes they mention 'We are going

to call the po-po on you.' So that means they are in an environment that speaks about police all the time," said Kimble.

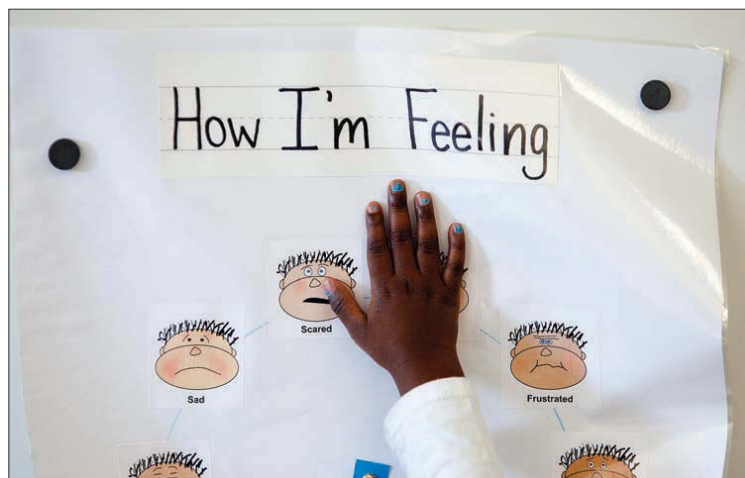
To children who come from physically or verbally abusive environments, hitting and fighting seem normal, Kimble said. But these behaviors can be disruptive to a learning environment in daycare settings, she added.

Agreeing, Stolbach said chronic stress and trauma can affect young children's social and educational development. These children, he said, are always in a state of heightened awareness and perceive threats that aren't there. They can become emotionally detached and have difficulty maintaining relationships.

"When you are in that alarm state all the time it makes it very difficult to do anything else," he said.

Kimble added that trauma affects children's ability to learn because they cannot focus, which is crucial for success in school. Recognizing the effects of trauma can help childcare providers and parents understand why kids are acting out and offer tools to help kids to settle down both at home and in school, she said.

Stolbach noted that childcare providers should make children feel that they are in a



DAVID PIERINI/Staff Photographer

A child uses a Feelings Chart to identify her emotions.

safe place and adults are here to keep them safe. Childcare providers should also tell children that they are not bad, but good and have a future, he added.

"If we embed those messages into the sys-

tems that are taking care of children then we stand a much better chance of helping them not to become traumatized or help them recover when they have the trauma," Stolbach said.

Closing the word gap, improving literacy

By La Risa Lynch

By age three, children in low income families have heard 30 million fewer words than their affluent peers, according to a 1995 study by University of Kansas child psychologists Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley. But a duo of University of Illinois at Chicago students hopes to close what has become known as the word gap to improve Austin preschoolers' literacy skills.

"We know that students who are not reading at grade level tend to struggle in school. We know that it is difficult for students who have fallen behind to catch up to their peers.

Our mission is to give students the best chance at success in early literacy," said Colleen Whittingham, a UIC doctoral candidate and member of Austin Early Childhood Collaborative (AECC).

But she stressed that it's not so much the number of words a child hears or says but the quality of conversation among parents and children.

"It doesn't help a child who is one to read them 'War and Peace' from cover to cover," Whittingham said. "The richness of those conversations is really where people should be focusing."

Whittingham and her colleague, Emily

Hoffman, also a UIC doctoral candidate, conducted a study of early literacy practices in Austin homes and childcare businesses. They plan to use the information help parents and childcare providers foster literacy skills such as listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

Whittingham and Hoffman want to show parents and childcare providers that play can be used to teach literacy. During a child's early learning years, from birth to age eight, learning and playing "look and feel like the same thing," Whittingham said.

"Play and informal learning actions with children are as effective ... as focusing on



those school type skills ... to build that vocabulary..." she said.

Improving literacy skills helps a child's social/emotional development, the doctoral students said. Critical thinking skills, comprehension and writing are skills that can begin in early childhood by engaging them in thought-provoking conversations, Whittingham said.

"So much of what we know about children's social and emotional wellbeing is tied to their abilities to express themselves through language and to have a rich vocabulary to talk to peers, parents and to have relationships and to handle conflict," she said.

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The AECC Awardees

From an influential legislator and policymaker to the humble owner of a beloved daycare center, this year's AECC honorees are a diverse lot -- and that's exactly how it should be, says the AECC's Program Manager Amy Voegel.

"That diversity is what gives this group its strength in terms of early childhood awareness. We just have a really broad range of people committed to this work who are really interested in making sure children in the Austin community have what they need to be successful," Voegel said.

The awards, which are given out each year at the AECC's annual Early Childhood Symposium, are designed to acknowledge individuals who, and organizations that, are committed to providing high quality services for Austin's young children. Although this year's eight awardees are different in many ways, they are united by one very unique quality -- they don't have to do what they're doing, but they're doing it anyway. That takes deep passion and a lot of love.

Take Ozzie Itson for instance, the owner of Itson's Day Care. Itson, has owned and operated her daycare for 14 years, but she began caring for children much earlier. Ironically, Itson's passion for childcare development was prompted by a bad experience. She remembers picking up her baby son from the person with whom she'd entrusted him and noticing that his pants were wet. She re-

alized he wasn't being properly taken care of.

"I wanted to keep other people's kids so that they would be kept right and they wouldn't have to worry about them when they left them with me," Itson said. She went from keeping watch over children in her church's youth center to owning a daycare center of her own. Just recently, at 75 years old, Itson graduated with a 3.3 GPA from Malcolm X College. She said she obtained an associate's degree in child development so she could be even better at her life's first love.

The same spirit of excellence animates VOCEL, a nonprofit preschool for children ages 6 weeks to 5 years old in the Austin community. Founders Kelly Lambrinatos and Jesse Ilhardt, both Teach For America alumnus, could probably have started careers and launched projects anywhere in the country, but they chose Austin.

"There was a need and a desire in this community," Lambrinatos said. "It really came down to the fact that there are so many kids in Austin who need care, but don't necessarily have access to it. People really seem hungry for this." These representative stories are only quick snapshots of the depth of commitment and the degree of passion embodied by this year's eight awardees, each of whom fills an irreplaceable niche in Austin's diverse and mutually beneficial early childhood environment.

— Michael Romain



Kelly Lambrinatos



Jesse Ilhardt



Dr. Shawn Jackson



Ozzie Itson



Rep. LaShawn Ford



Lisa Smith



Donnita Travis



Lenita Edgeworth



Cynthia Peterson

Awards for Excellence in Professional Development

Founded in 2013 by Teach For America alumni Kelly Lambrinatos and Jesse Ilhardt, VOCEL has quickly emerged as one of Chicago's most imaginative early education institutions. Every year since its launch, VOCEL -- which serves children ages 6 months to 5 years old -- has been named either a semifinalist or finalist in A Better Chicago's Project Impact competition. Project Impact provides funding to the most innovative nonprofit organizations throughout the city.

Dr. Shawn Jackson is the principal of Austin's Spencer Technology Academy. At the helm since 2007, Jackson has more than tripled the percentage of students at Spencer testing at grade level and infused a culture of hope and success by implementing innovative programs such as Parent University and Parent Scholars. "There are no successful schools without parental involvement," Jackson told the Chicago Sun-Times in 2012.

Since its founding 14 years ago by Ozzie Itson, Itson's Day Care, which Ozzie manages with her daughter, has become beloved and respected throughout the Austin area. A long-time volunteer in the Mars Hill Baptist Church's children's department,

Ozzie Itson recently attained an associate's degree in child development from Malcolm X College. At 75 years old, she graduated with a 3.3 GPA.

Awards for Excellence in Community Engagement

Elected to the State's General Assembly in 2007, Rep. LaShawn Ford (D-8th) has been one of the city's most dynamic forces for early childhood development and education awareness. A key force behind the formation of the AECC's parent organization, Austin Coming Together, Ford has presided over numerous subcommittee hearings on elementary and secondary education in Springfield. One of his primary legislative platforms is the expansion of early childhood education.

Lisa Smith, a head start teacher at DePriest Elementary School, has nearly 20 years of experience in early childhood education. While at DePriest, Smith has been instrumental in some of the school's most imaginative programming, such as the Keep Kids Learning Summer Camp, a project designed to engage the whole child beyond the regular school year, and to encourage students to think about careers early on.

Founded in 2001 by former advertising executive Donnita Travis, the By the Hand Club for Kids

serves public school students in some of Chicago's toughest housing projects and neighborhoods, Austin included. In 2005, the Chicago Housing Authority called by the Hand its "most effective social service agency." Since its founding, the organization has nurtured thousands of children in communities across the city.

Awards for Excellence in Family Engagement

Lenita Edgeworth has been a parent educator with the nonprofit Bethel New Life for four years. She has a bachelor's in criminal justice from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and a paralegal certificate from Roosevelt University. In her work, Edgeworth encourages parents to engage their small children "one step at a time."

Cynthia Peterson has been a family community resource coordinator at Spencer Elementary Technology Academy in Austin for 23 years. A resident of the Austin neighborhood for over 30 years, Peterson has played a critical role in implementing the school's Parent Scholars and Parent University programs. She believes that the collaboration between parents and the community is essential for student success.



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